

Testimony on House Bills 4402 Through 4405

Revision of Michigan Laws to Eliminate Life Without Parole Sentencing for Juveniles

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**By: Elizabeth Arnovits, Executive Director,
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**To: House Judiciary Committee Chair, Representative
Paul Condino, and Committee Members**

Thank you Chairman Condino and committee members. I appreciate being given this opportunity to provide testimony to the committee.

My name is Elizabeth Arnovits and I am the Executive Director of the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency . The Council is a non-profit citizen's organization dedicated to advocating for public safety policies that reduce crime and effectively utilize tax payer's money.

I am here today on behalf of the Council's citizen membership to support House Bills 4402 through 4405. These series of Bills, as you know, propose to amend Michigan Laws to permit the State Parole Board to at least consider an individual for parole who has been convicted of a crime in adult court for which the sentence is life without parole, if that individual was younger than 17 when the crime was committed.

The Council was established in 1956 and I have had the pleasure of being Director since 1979. The Council follows the trends and public policies impacting Juvenile and Adult sentencing among the States and at the National level. You will hear testimony today from members of the Michigan Chapter of the ACLU that will provide more thorough background and basis for these Bills. Our Council bases its support for these Bills on the excellent report done by the Michigan ACLU titled "Second Chances".

That report points out that:

Under current Michigan laws, particularly the automatic waiver to adult court provisions in our Juvenile Code, we sentence a disproportionate number of youth aged 16 and under to life without parole compared to other states.

That many of those sentenced may have lacked the ability or the maturity to be aware of the consequences of their acts.

Life without parole for many of these individuals does not serve societies interest in public safety or the interest of justice. As they serve at least 10 years in prison, as these Bills call for, they can develop that maturity and the skills and ability to become a productive member of society.

The Council has been directly involved with the State's Prisoner Re-entry Initiative. We know that we have been successful in many communities in developing a support system for parolees and reducing incarceration costs. We believe these Bills establish a better policy in balancing public safety and the responsibility to wisely manage the taxpayers' money than our current laws, which don't even allow the parole board to consider parole.

We urge your support of these Bills. Thank you for your time and attention.